

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

All the Year Round

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A STORY IN THREE PARTS.

BY MRS. CASHEL-HOEY.

THE FIRST PART.

CHAPTER II. IN "THE LOYAL AND EVER FAITHFUL ISLE."

THE sun was up, but as yet only beaming benignantly, not in a merciless glare as at mid-day—when man and beast would have to hide from its unbearable splendour—over the beautiful Cuban Bay; upon the great Sierra, which, uprearing itself from the coast, stretches along the face of the island; upon the rich country beyond the towns; and upon the Plaza de Armas, and the square-towered cathedral of Santiago de Cuba.

There is an air of repose upon the vast church; and a constant coolness, which makes itself felt from the moment its great doors have been passed, reigns within it. This coolness was very fresh and pleasant at six o'clock on a glorious morning—that is the only word for a morning in the Pearl of the Antilles, and not a bit hyperbolical—at the end of May, twenty years ago. Even in the formal Plaza, with its spare trees planted in lines; in the very realistic market-place; and in the long line of wide verandahed and balconied houses of La Calle del Catedral, the effects of light and shade were sufficiently various and beautiful to delight the unaccustomed eyes of a certain Englishman newly come to Cuba, who had been exhorted by a fellow-countryman of older experience to make a study of the scene at that early hour.

Henry Rodney had likewise explained to Hugh Rosslyn, that, by attending an early mass at the cathedral he would procure a favourable opportunity for making artistic

studies of another kind, likely to interest him even more vividly than the architectural details of the building, and the shadow and shine about its majestic bulk.

"The señoritas and the señoritas go to mass at six or thereabouts," said Rodney, "and the church is a pretty sight then. When they have done their devotions, they do their shopping and 'calls'—very literal morning-visiting it is here—and then they go into eclipse until it is Alameda or Plaza time. But whether they drive in the Alameda or walk in the Plaza, I do not think they are so picturesque as when one sees them at their devotions. I advise you to get your first impression of the Creole ladies at church."

"Thank you," said Rosslyn. "I will go to the cathedral early to-morrow."

Rosslyn's first impression of the cathedral was that it was cold and bare. He had travelled widely enough by this time to have become accustomed to the subdued movement in Catholic churches, to the simultaneous services in different parts of the edifice, to the coming and going among the worshippers, and to that mingling of ease with reverence which is at first a difficulty as well as a surprise to "foreigners." In the interior of the cathedral of Santiago he found everything very quiet at that early hour, the centre of the church nearly empty, and himself apparently the only person there in the character of a mere spectator. According to the custom in Spanish churches, where, in obedience to the strict ritual, all are supposed to kneel during the whole service, no seats are provided, and the few wooden benches which in the cathedral of Santiago form the exception, were so placed that the stranger could not see as much as he wanted to see from them. He accordingly took up a standing position by

the entrance to a side-chapel, whence came the musical tinkling of silver bells, and began to look about him.

There was nothing in his manner at all offensive; he was not of the order of English travellers who make the English name hateful in other lands; but in his attitude and in his look there was an alert attentiveness which would at once have marked him as a stranger to anyone who observed him. It was manifest that he was taking no part in the sacred office proceeding in the chapel dedicated to San Ignacio, which was well filled with kneeling figures, but was looking on with curiosity, not disrespectful, yet sufficiently keen to reveal want of custom. His tall, well-built, active-looking figure; the light grey suit he wore; his brown hair and moustache; his clear, fair complexion and grey eyes; all marked him as an Englishman.

Hugh Rosslyn stood by the pillar, observing the kneeling forms and bent heads in the little crowd—noticing that these early worshippers all wore veils, in some instances of extremely rich lace, covering elaborately-dressed hair of lustrous black—and waited patiently for the conclusion of the mass, when he should be able to see their faces. The moment came, the celebrant retired from the altar, followed by the acolyte, and, with a surprising ease of movement, considering that they were kneeling flat upon the floor, the women, who almost exclusively formed the congregation, rose and came out of the chapel of San Ignacio into the body of the church.

Then the young Englishman, whose presence was by no means unnoticed, but commented on by many a confidential nudge and whispered “Inglés,” could take note of the equipment of a Cuban lady for church-going purposes; of the fresh and becoming attire, made so graceful and refined by the veil; the richly-bound, gold-clasped prayer-book; the costly rosary; the fan, generally black and gold; the absurd little chair of papier-maché, inlaid with mother-o’-pearl; and the small square of gay carpet.

Several young negresses, who had attended their mistresses to the cathedral, and, having spread the carpets and placed the chairs, had betaken themselves to the remote corner set apart for them, now came forward to remove those articles, and in their turn attracted the attention of the young Englishman. These girls were quite

black, with shiny, good-humoured faces, wide mouths, nostrils to match, and frizzy hair showing under gaudy-coloured handkerchiefs, worn turban-wise upon their heads. Hugh Rosslyn had been only twenty-four hours in “The loyal and ever faithful island,” and he still felt the mingled curiosity, repulsion, shame, and compassion with which the first sight of a human chattel inspires all thinking and feeling people, that were stronger and commoner twenty years ago, when the death-note of slavery was but just sounding in the bugle-blast of “Unconditional Surrender” Grant’s decisive victories.

“And those girls are slaves!” thought Hugh as the black damsels passed him—some of them giving him a friendly grin—and entered the chapel to collect the belongings of their owners. “Here comes an old slave.”

The negress who came last, using a stick, which made a tapping on the stone floor, was not so aged as Hugh Rosslyn took her to be. She was not much over fifty, but to his European eyes she looked twenty years older. Her figure was bent; the tufts of hair that showed beneath her kerchief turban were grey; and over her black skin that livid tint, which makes the negro so ghastly in old age, when the shine has left his face, was spreading. The negro physiognomy was so novel to Hugh Rosslyn, that all the young black faces looked alike to him; but this old woman attracted his attention by more than her ugliness—by the intelligence of her countenance, and the keenness of the glance of her eye, full, round, and black, like the others, but without their unmeaning roll. She waited, leaning on her stick, until the black girls had collected the toy chairs and kneeling-carpets, and when the last of them had followed the señoras, she, too, entered the chapel, where, as Hugh Rosslyn now observed, a solitary worshipper still lingered. The kneeling figure in a corner close to the altar-rail did not move at the tapping of the old woman’s stick, but as she touched its shoulder it rose. Hugh Rosslyn had now approached the chapel of San Ignacio, and as the lady turned and faced him, with a rosary of coral, the decades divided by large golden beads hanging from her clasped hands, he beheld the most beautiful face on which his eyes had ever rested until that hour.

She had started at the touch of the negress, and risen mechanically, but she had not shaken off the absorbing influence

of her thoughts ; she was not quite awake to external things ; and it was not beauty only that her face revealed to the stranger of whose presence she was unconscious, but trouble. A pressing trouble it must be to take so close a grip of one so young.

The old negress whispered something to her as she took up the praying-carpet and the little chair ; the girl placed the rosary in a bag covered with fine embroidery in coloured silks, which hung at her side by a silver chain of antique workmanship, and, having made a deep genuflection, walked out of the chapel, and in the direction of the great door of the cathedral. Her step was so free, proud, and graceful, her mien so composed, that the young man, who had followed her with his eyes like one fascinated, could hardly believe in the almost wild trouble he had recognised in her face with his first glimpse of it.

"She comes of Andalusian ancestry, or she could not walk like that," said Hugh Rosslyn to himself as he also mechanically took his way to the cathedral-door, and emerged into the increasing sunshine. "I wonder who she is ? Young as they marry here, I don't think she is married. There she goes ; the old negress talking earnestly to her—a Cuban Juliet and her nurse, perhaps. A lucky fellow the Romeo, whoever he may be ! There, she speaks to an acquaintance ! I wish I could find out who she is. Perhaps Rodney may know the family. He seems to have made acquaintance with everybody in the place, after the true journalist's fashion. Stay ! There's nothing easier than to find out where she lives—I'll follow them."

He did follow them, and they led him a good way. He kept at a proper distance, and he had no reason to suppose that either the young lady or the old negress was aware of his presence. At length they turned into a street composed of walled-in buildings on one side, and a few houses of the ordinary old-fashioned Cuban style, single-storeyed, tile-roofed, with wide windows, and a huge street-door, which remains unclosed all day, on the other. Above the high walls that enclosed the buildings opposite, and hid from view all but their flat roofs, rose a long line of fine lime-trees, and some palmettoes. A wide, strongly-barred, square-topped wooden door broke the uniformity of the long white wall. A large ring, suspended by a brass chain, protruded from the wall on the right, and there was a wired wicket in the door.

Hugh Rosslyn halted at the turn into the street. There was nobody visible except the objects of his observation, and he saw them cross the roadway to the door in the opposite wall. The negress pulled the ring ; after a short delay the wire plate of the wicket slid back, and a face appeared in the orifice. There was but a moment's parley ; the great door was opened by someone who was invisible from where Rosslyn stood, and it admitted and closed upon the young lady only.

The negress, carrying the praying-carpet and the chair, walked slowly up the street, along the blank white wall ; a proceeding which greatly bewildered Hugh. The enclosed house was evidently not her abode ; had it been, she would have disengaged herself of the things she carried before going out again. Nor was it that of her young charge, or mistress, for just the same reason. He was no wiser than when he left the cathedral, but he was more eager in his pursuit. In addition to the curiosity that had been awakened in him, the hunting instinct was now aroused, and it vexed him sorely to be baffled. Yet he was obliged to own that he was baffled, for, supposing he were to follow the negress to the next place at which she stopped, how was he to know whether it was her abode and that of the young lady, or not ?

Rodney had told him that the Cuban ladies did their shopping and their visiting after their early devotions. This fair one, of whom he had obtained so brief and tantalising a glimpse, might be about to employ the morning hours in either of these ways, and it was clearly impossible that he could watch her exit from the house she had entered, and then follow her about until he had fairly housed her in her manifest home.

Rosslyn was not free, while turning over those considerations in his mind, from the sense that it was anything but a gentlemanly action to entertain them at all ; that, as a matter of fact, he was not behaving well. He did not, however, give the scruple entertainment, but put it aside impatiently. He was still standing irresolutely at the turn into the broad street, when the negress again crossed and passed him, walking quickly with the aid of her tapping stick. She looked sharply at him as she gained the narrow and uneven footpath. He acted on an impulse, saluted her gravely, and mustering the very little Spanish he possessed, said :

"I am a stranger, having only been a day in Santiago. Can you tell me what that building with the high wall is?"

She answered him freely, pronouncing her words with less of the broad accent of the negro speech than is common to her class :

"Yes, señor, I can tell your honour. The building is the convent of Las Anonciades."

He thanked and again saluted her, and she disappeared round the turn, leaving him to wander in a purposeless way along the house-fronts, until the appearance of some other wayfarers in the street reminded him that his demeanour might arouse suspicion. At the same moment the loud chiming of the hour from a public building in the vicinity reminded him that Rodney would be expecting him at the house in the Calle de Santa Rosa, where Hugh had found him when he presented himself as the bearer of a letter of introduction from the London correspondent of the great New York journal which Rodney, with a roving commission, represented. The Antilles offered several points of interest to the United States of America at the epoch with which this story has to deal in this place, and Rodney had fixed his headquarters in the "Pearl" among those gems of the tropics.

As Hugh Rosslyn, beginning by this time to discover with what rapidity the cool of the morning passes away in Cuba, made his way back to the abode which had so charmed his artistic taste for originality on the previous day, he seriously revolved the question whether he was not a fool? He had looked at a beautiful face—for how long?—perhaps for three minutes; and it seemed to him that all the other beautiful faces he had ever seen, and they were many, had fallen far short of his ideal, and that only this one perfectly fulfilled it—this one, with its splendid colouring, its pure form, its lovely youthfulness, its pathetic trouble. He had looked upon that face for perhaps three minutes, and it had become his first object, his leading desire, to behold it again—the most important thing in his life to discover who the girl was that possessed this radiant loveliness. There could be no manner of doubt that he was a fool, but it is not on record that folly of this kind has ever been cured by calling itself by its right name, and Hugh Rosslyn was not likely

to prove the first exception. He drew imaginary pictures of the lovely Creole as he retraced his steps to the Calle de Santa Rosa, and resolved to fix her face in his memory by reproducing it on canvas as soon as possible.

After all, it was a great thing to be a painter; one could defy the transience of one's impressions, and, in a manner, become the possessor of beautiful things that address themselves for but a moment to the eyes and the fancy, passing away like the tender tints of the morning from those not so endowed. Yes; he would first sketch the girl's portrait, and then seek her out. It might be difficult, but he would not be conquered by difficulty. Hugh Rosslyn had come within sight of the "Camp," as Rodney called his dwelling, and had recognised it, with entire indifference to the fine view of the bay which it commanded, before he happily remembered that the well-informed roving commissioner had spoken of the attendance of the Cuban ladies at the early mass as a custom. At this recollection he cheered up amazingly, and presented himself to his new friend with an aspect of content.

Rodney, whom he found writing at a rickety little spindle-shanked table strewn with papers, and smoking the almost uninterrupted Honradez cigarette, was dressed like a South American cotton-planter, in a suit of spotless white drill, a broad-leaved Panama hat lay on the clean bare floor at his feet, and he looked very cool and comfortable.

Rodney greeted Rosslyn, who had found the door open and walked in without any of the usual formalities, with great cordiality, and asked him whether he had taken his "tienta pié."

"No," answered Rosslyn, and added: "What is it?"

"It's the Cuban equivalent for the little breakfast that, when it is called 'Chota Hazree,' puzzles all the people who write about India, and leads them into much nonsense. It's a cup of very thick chocolate, and a roll with imported butter scooped out of a bottle, and it is supposed to give you a foothold upon existence until you have your real breakfast at eleven. Look there," he pointed to a second rickety little table in a corner, where Rosslyn found the described refreshment on a brass tray, covered with a white cloth. "Just dispose of that, will you, like a good fellow, while I am finishing up my work for the mail? You can look round if you like. There's

nobody about yet ; it is not time for the lively young blacks to swarm up the window-rails, or do their siesta in our balcony."

Thinking that his new friend was an unusually considerate sort of person, Rosslyn did as he was told. He did not particularly like the thick chocolate and the bottled butter, but he consumed both with a good grace, and then proceeded to look about him, while Rodney wrote on with a rapid pen.

The house temporarily occupied by Rodney had been lent to him by a Cuban artist of considerable reputation, with whom he had chummed since his arrival at "The Garden of the West." Don Gualterio de las Turras had gone to Santo Domingo on a sketching expedition, and his guest remained in possession. It was with no little interest that Hugh Rosslyn examined the first Cuban dwelling in which he had set his foot, and discovered that he had fallen upon art quarters. The muse of painting was not so splendidly lodged, even in London, twenty years ago, as she now is. Our Prince Painter had not then built her a palace, and her feet still lingered on the threshold of Bohemia ; nevertheless, there were studios and studios—some mere temples of bric-à-brac, others real workshops where real work was done. The latter were to the liking of Hugh Rosslyn, and in the Cuban artist's habitation he recognised a kindred taste. The house—one-storeyed, of course—consisted of six rooms, with a wide balcony, and a spacious patio or courtyard. The studio was a very large room, with wide and lofty apertures, guarded by iron bars, but devoid of glass. From the studio and the balcony, a room in itself, the deep blue waters of the bay, the white sails of the gliding ships and boats, and the curving coast, with the long line of the Sierra, may be seen in all the varying beauty of that "long sunny lapse of the summer day's light" which Cuba boasts, "year in, year out." Beautiful in sunlight, and beautiful in moonlight, when "the lesser light to rule the night" hangs far down in the sky, and shines with a radiance never shown to us of northern climes, the scene always before the eyes of the painter was one from which an artist might draw unfailing inspiration. And Don Gualterio de Turras had done so, it seemed to Hugh Rosslyn, as his glance wandered from one to another of the paintings that adorned the walls, making

ample amends for the scantiness of the furniture. He recognised in them the hand of a master.

"There, that's done!" exclaimed Rodney, as he laid on the table the parcel he had just made up, and pushed away his writing-materials. "Now we can have a talk and a smoke." He appeared to be unaware that he had been smoking all the time. "You'll find a cane lounge behind the door. I hope the leg-piece is not broken off. Ah, I see it's all right. Pull it out on that side. Here you are," handing to Rosslyn a box of Honradez ; "now tell me what you've been doing. Did you go to the cathedral?"

"I was there a few minutes after six. It is a fine building, but rather bare in comparison with some of the great churches I have seen. I dare say it looks well with a crowd in it, but there were not many people ; they were almost all women."

"I promised you a good opportunity of seeing the *señoras* and *señoritas*. You have probably seen this morning a large proportion of the élite of the Creole society. Do they come up to your idea ? Are they worthy of the poet's praise that has been lavished on them ? Are they like the pictures which Joaquin Cuadras has painted ?"

"I saw some pretty faces," said Rosslyn, "but I cannot say I carried away any very distinct impression, except in one case." He tried to make his tone unconcerned, but he did not quite succeed, and Rosslyn darted an amused glance at him.

"And that ? A *señora* or a *señorita* ?"

"The most beautiful girl I have ever seen !"

Rosslyn removed his cigarette from his lips and let his hand hang over the side of the lounge, while his face showed that he was gazing on the fair image in his fancy.

"Indeed ! She should be worth seeing. I admire the Creole ladies very much, but I get a little tired of their monotony. It's the same with all dark-eyed, black-haired races ; they are so much alike."

"There was not another face in the cathedral this morning like the one I'm thinking of."

"Describe it," said Rodney.

"I could paint it, or something like it, more easily ; but I will try. Age eighteen, I should say, if she were not of this country, but more probably sixteen ; shape of face a short oval, the features simply perfect in contour and delicacy ; the mouth

small and coral-red ; the eyes large, black, soft, with wonderful lashes ; the complexion —what shall I call it ? Of course it is not fair, but it is far more beautiful than the fairest, for the blood shows through it just as the light shows through the black eyes. I thought of an English apricot, in its perfect stage of ripeness, when I caught sight of the turn of the cheek, and yet, what an inexpressive comparison ! Her hair, as black as jet, but as smooth and polished, was arranged in some marvellous way that raised it like the crest of a wave on both sides of the head, and a veil of black lace covered, but did not hide it."

"A mantilla, not a veil," said Rodney in a softly corrective tone.

"Well, then, a mantilla. Her dress was all white ; the black lace hung over it like a cloud."

"Did she wear a comb in her hair, and flowers ?" asked Rodney with affected seriousness.

"Yes, yes," answered Rosslyn eagerly. "Do you know her ? Do you recognise her by my description ? I thought it likely you might."

Rodney laughed good-naturedly, rose, and walked across the studio to a part of the wall, against which three or four large canvases stood, with the faces turned to it.

"Know her ? Recognise her ? Why, my dear fellow, you have merely sketched the typical Creole-girl—merely drawn a portrait which would fit one half of the Santiago young-ladyhood. Short, oval faces, perfect features, coral lips, jet-black hair, which they are unmatched adepts in arranging—apricot complexions—with a trick of verging on the pomegranate, when their first youth is past—those are their typical points. You have only to add a lovely figure without an angle in it, dimpled arms, and pink-palmed hands, and you have one of Don Gualterio's (slightly flattered) originals to the life. Look here !"

He turned the outermost canvas of the pile placed against the wall, and displayed it to Rosslyn. The picture represents a love-scene, the "courting" being according to the approved Cuban fashion. Behind the iron bars of an unglazed window, opening upon the street, and raised only two or three feet above the pavement, sits, in a sort of framework of light drapery, a beautiful Creole, attired in a low-necked, short-sleeved, but perfectly modest dress ; one dimpled arm rests on the lower cross-bar, above a handsome scroll of ironwork ; her shapely left hand holds a fan in the in-

imitable Spanish manner, while the graceful neck and head, and the dark-glowing, serious eyes are turned to the ardent gaze of her lover, who stands outside the bars, and does his wooing thus honestly before "all the world." He wears the white clothes and the Panama hat of custom, and he does not doff his hat, because even Cuban lovers may not laugh at sunstroke.

The young painter was immensely struck with the grace, beauty, and sentiment of the picture, and he at once recognised the justice of Rodney's remarks. His description of the kneeling beauty of the chapel of San Ignacio might have applied feature by feature to the face on the canvas of Don Gualterio de Turras. And yet it was not a portrait of her ; it was a typical picture.

"Yes, I see," he said ; "the form and the colouring, the hair and the head-dress are all like. Indeed, this might be a portrait of the girl I saw, if only she were looking troubled instead of happy, and a rosary of coral and gold were in the place of that fan."

"A rosary of coral and gold," repeated Rodney, "H'm ! I think there's a clue to your beautiful incognita in that. You have indeed observed her with a painter's comprehensive eye. Was the rosary very conspicuous—not a small one ?"

"It was remarkably handsome ; the coral a fine colour, and the gold beads as big as horse-beans."

"I know the señorita. That rosary is as well-known in Santiago as the Empress Eugénie's diamond cross in Paris. It was a royal gift from Her Catholic Majesty, Isabella, Queen of the Spains, no less, to the first wife of my very good friend, Don Saturnino de Rodas, a rich coffee-planter and magnate of these parts, and it now belongs to his daughter, the fair Ines."

"And you have seen her ? You know her ?"

"I am in the habit of seeing her, and though I won't go so far as to say she is the most beautiful girl I ever saw, I will confess that she is the prettiest of the Santiago señoritas."

"Of course she is greatly admired."

"Of course." This time Rodney's glance at his susceptible young friend was one of unrestrained amusement. "And has lots of suitors, no doubt. What are those lines in Hood's charming verses addressed to her namesake ? Ah yes—

"The smile that blessed one lover's heart,
Hath broken many more."

He carefully put the canvas back in its

place, and maliciously waited for the hesitating request which he knew Rosslyn was longing to make. At last it came.

"Could you—could you introduce me?"

"My dear fellow, I'll take you to a 'tertulia' there this evening, and you shall meet her by moonlight. Now, get your hat and let us go to breakfast."

ERRORS NOT VULGAR.

SIR T. BROWNE wrote about "vulgar errors," as he called them; but the errors respecting the animal and vegetable worlds, which were current all through the Middle Ages, were just the reverse of vulgar—they were scholarly. They came of the habit, against which Lord Bacon was never tired of crying out, of accepting things on authority. If Aristotle or Pliny had said it, it must be true; and so monk after monk copied it out and put it into his treatise, though to test it would have been to refute it, and the means of testing were close at hand. This method of taking things on trust was the bane of the old philosophy. It came down to quite modern times; and, despite Bacon's insisting on experiment, there will always be a great many folks who would rather argue for an hour than spend five minutes in trying whether a thing is really so. Charles the Second knew human nature when he proposed the impudent question: "How is it that, if you slip a live fish into a brimming bowl of water, no water is spilt, whereas, if the fish is dead, the water runs over?" The Royal Society had lately been founded, and the learned pundits went at the royal problem with a will. Some thought the air in the live fish prevented displacement; some gave one reason, some another, and it was a long time before one of them thought of trying, and found at once that the Merry Monarch had been hoaxing them.

"Authority" decided everything, not in matters theological only. Aristotle knew what he was writing about; and, even if Aristotle's dictum had been shown to be contrary to facts, the reply of the mediæval scholar would have been: "So much the worse for the facts." Pliny, the great Roman naturalist, took every word of Aristotle on trust, and added to him a heap of stories which he had got from friends, and had picked up during his official circuits in North Italy. He was the most indefatigable of folk-lorists. Whenever he met

anyone who had a story, he would stop his litter, and write it down from the man's mouth, though the weather was sometimes so cold that he had to wear thick gloves to keep his fingers from being frost-bitten. A good, kindly man he was; as was also his nephew, the younger Pliny, who endowed a free school in his native town, and left money to furnish marriage-portions for deserving maidens, and tried to avoid bringing the law to bear on the Christians; but the elder, at any rate, must often have been cheated if he listened as unquestioningly to tales of distress as he did to travellers' stories.

And yet, for all his credulity, Pliny was a prince of investigators compared with any of the writers who came between him and Gesner. He believed others, just because he knew that, when he himself investigated a thing, he tried to come to the bottom of it. Investigation, indeed, cost him his life. The green hill of Vesuvius, which Virgil recommends as a bit of choice pasture, had just been changed into a new *Ætna*; and the elder Pliny was so anxious to find out the reason of volcanoes that he fell into the crater.

Get Holland's translation of the worthy Pliny if you want an afternoon's amusement. He will tell you that, if you cut off the tip of a dog's tail within forty days from its birth, it will never go mad, and that the best of the litter is the whelp which gets its eyesight last, or that which the mother carries first into her kennel. Of the dog's faithfulness he has notable instances. It has been known to throw itself into the flames when its master's funeral-pyre was kindled. It will breed with the tiger. The Indians cross their dogs in that way. The first and second crosses are too savage; the third can be trained. No matter how fierce a dog is, it will never attack you if you sit down—Homer says the same thing in the *Odyssey*—and it may be silenced by holding to it a brand snatched from a funeral-pyre. When cremation was given up, this recipe had to be modified; and for the brand was substituted "the hand of glory," which credulous mediæval burglars used to carry, with the view of keeping the watchdog quiet. The most fighting breed was the Molossian, a splendid sample of which the King of Albania gave to Alexander the Great when he was going to India. Alexander had boars, stags, and bears slipped to it, but the dog lay motionless; whereat the King's anger was roused that

such a noble form should cover so sluggish a spirit, and he bade the dog be killed, sending a message to the giver that the gift had proved unworthy of them both. Whereupon another like dog was sent, with the warning that the first dog's inaction in presence of small game was not due to sluggishness but to contempt, such dogs being used to be matched against elephants and lions. Alexander at once tried him with a lion, which he slew, and then set him at an elephant, round which he circled, baying loudly, and with all his bristles erect, attacking first on one side and then on the other, slipping in and avoiding the elephant's stroke whenever he got the chance. At last the elephant grew dizzy, and, falling down, was made a prey by its small-sized antagonist. Unlike bees, and rats, and cows, and several other creatures — including pheasants, which Norfolk poachers catch with peas steeped in brandy — dogs can never be got to drink anything stronger than water, at least so Pliny says. Hence the Roman nickname, "prandium caninum" (a dog's lunch), for a teetotal banquet. For the virtues of dogs consult Bochart's *Hierozoicon*, and note how seldom or never Shakespeare (herein at one with Scripture) has a good word for the dog. In that he fails behind the ancients, who (though they freely use "dog" as a word of reproach) bear frequent testimony to the faithfulness of the animal. No poet, nowadays, could speak better of a pet mastiff than Homer in the *Odyssey* does of that dog, well-nigh twenty years old, that recognised Ulysses when his own father had forgotten him. Dogs, Mr. Watkins says, in his *Gleanings from the Natural History of the Ancients*, were yearly crucified at Rome, because one night they forgot their duty, and left to the geese the task of giving notice that the Gauls were scaling the Capitol. Pliny speaks of puppies' flesh being eaten, just as if Rome had learnt from China: "At solemn festival suppers in honour of the gods, they forgot not to serve up certain dishes of suckling whelps' flesh."

Our island has always been a famous place for dogs; they were one of the regular exports from Britain along with tin and fair-haired slaves. Holinshed says: "There is no countrie that may compare with ours in number, excellencie, and diversities of dogs." Dr. Caius, second founder of the Cambridge college known as "Gonville and Caius," wrote an account of our dogs for Gesner's *Natural History*.

He was a Frenchman, this "jewel and glory of Cambridge," and is laughed at in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Yet he, too, had his scholar's errors, else he would not talk of lobster-hound, and of the urcanus (dogbear), "bred of a bear and a bandog." The Frenchman usually loved the Scot, so long as both were fighting against England; but Dr. Caius empties all the vials of his scorn on the Scotch terrier: "A beggarly beast brought out of barbarous borders," etc. What would he have said of the dog in Chaucer's *Pardonner and Tapster*:

A whelp,
That ley undir a steyir, a gret Walsh dog
That bare about his neck a gret huge clog,
Because he was spetouse (spiteful) and wold
sone bite?

We share our love for the dog with our Aryan brethren in the Ganges Valley. When Indra's car is waiting to take a Hindoo hero to heaven, he comes up with his dog. "I don't take dogs," says Indra. "Then I don't go," replies the hero.

Strangely enough, about elephants, Pliny is a good deal nearer the truth than he is about dogs. Borrowing from Aristotle, he explains just as accurately how they are caught and tamed as if he was a globe-trotter returned from Ceylon. He is right, too, in telling how certain natives wait up a tree till the last of the herd is passing under. On this they drop, and seizing its tail in their left hand, use the other hand in hamstringing it. He records the story of the Roman soldier who cut off the trunk of one of Pyrrhus's elephants, and so saved the legion from going down the third time before the Macedonian phalanx; and he tells, too, how Hannibal offered a Roman prisoner his life if he could beat an elephant in single fight, though I hope he is wrong in adding that the Punic General sent horsemen to waylay the man when, after coming off victorious, he had been set at liberty. He is certainly wrong in saying that African elephants, assembling in troops of fours and fives, and interlacing legs and trunks, commit themselves to the waves and float over to the finer pasture of Arabia; though not more wrong than Aristotle, who says that the elephant cannot swim, but walks across deep rivers breathing through its uplifted trunk. A scholarly error about elephants was that of the Vicar of Ottery St. Mary, father of Coleridge the poet, who took the mammoths' bones, so often found in the south of England, to belong to elephants brought over by the Romans, quoting Polyænus's

Stratagems to the effect that Cæsar used one when forcing the passage of the Thames. "He does not mention it in his Commentaries, thinking it would detract from the honour of his victories." It is remarkable, by the way, than an elephant's head and trunk are sculptured on one of the capitals in Ottery St. Mary's Church. One is glad to learn from Cicero that when Pompey had twenty elephants hunted to death in the circus to delight the people, the feeling roused was not delight but pity; "the spectators thought that there was a kinship to man in the sagacious creatures."

Pliny, who says that "wild rose-leaves reduced to a liniment with bear's grease, doth wonderfully make haire to grow again," tells many strange things about wolves. He believes in the versipellis, turnskin, or were-wolf; and he holds that a wolf's snout is a counter-charm against all sorcery, and that new-wedded wives should anoint the side-posts of their house with wolf's fat, so that no charms may have power to enter. *Ælian* adds to the queer animal stories set down by Pliny. A wolf, he says, cannot bend its head back; and if it treads on the squill-flower it at once becomes torpid, therefore foxes take care to strew squills in the dens of wolves!

Elephants in Britain, under the Romans, were a dream of the Rev. J. Coleridge; but they as well as lions lived here in the pre-glacial days, and in Greece lions lasted well on into historic times. Herodotus says that in Thessaly and Macedonia they fell on the baggage-animals of Xerxes, choosing the camels, whereat the Father of History is astonished, seeing that they might have had horses, and oxen, and other creatures to which they were accustomed. Both Aristotle and Pliny speak of lions as existing in the same parts in which Xerxes found them. They simply copied Herodotus; though they eschew his statement that the lioness only brings forth once in her life. Aristotle, on the contrary, says: "The Syrian lioness bears first five cubs, next four, and so on down to one, after which she never breeds again." The lion comes in so often in Homer, and as the central figure of so many vivid pictures, that the poet must have known him at least as well as a modern Frenchman does the wild boar.

Of oysters—which Homer mentions, saying, when a wounded man falls headlong from his chariot, "if he were only in the fishy deep he would satisfy

many men by grasping for oysters, plunging in from a ship, though the weather was rough"—Pliny has many stories. He believes in Cleopatra and her pearl; British pearls he calls small and poor in colour; the colour, he says, may be improved by laying them out in the sun (so, in Lothair, the jeweller comes once a year to lay the Duchess's pearls out in the sun with a south wind). How pearls come he has settled beyond question. "At the right season of the year they yawn and gape, and receive a certain moist dew, wherewith they swell and grow big, and the fruit of this is the pearls, better or worse, great or small, according to the quality and quantity of the dew. If that were pure and clean which went into them, then are the pearls white, fair, and orient (i.e., bright), but if gross and troubled, the pearls likewise are dim, foul, and duskish." He moralises at great length on the luxury which sends men among sea-dogs and other dangers, "where, too, their hands may be clean cut off between the edges of the shell, that our dames may hang pearls on their fingers and in their ears, and garnish their shoes therewith. . . . Everybody wears them, and women have a proverb that a fair pearl in one's ear is as good as a lictor to clear the way, for that everyone will give such the place."

Aristotle believed that rain-water breeds eels and gudgeons. "When marshes are dried up, and the earth has taken in much warmth, then, if there comes much rain the waters begin to teem with little fish, and it is clear that they are not born from eggs, for in lakes full of water they are not generated, only after a drought they come into life from the water of showers." "Fishes sleep," says Aristotle, "though with unclosed eyes; dolphins, whales, and such as have an air-passage, letting it project above the water, and gently moving their fins. Ere now, some have heard a dolphin snoring." Indian river-eels, says Pliny, are so strong and big — being sixty cubits long — that when elephants come to drink they force them down and drown them. What with them and the snakes, who thrust their heads into their nostrils, stop their breathing, and sting them to death, the Indian elephants have little comfort of their life. About the eels of Lake Benacus (the Lago di Garda), he tells the same story which is current in the Norfolk Broads. Mr. Davies writes of the Norfolk

eels coming down "in solid balls from one to two feet across, heads inside and tails out, and plumping into the nets with such force as to carry them away." He is great on the echeneis, "that little fish, which men call remora, which stays ships by fastening itself to them; moreover, it hath this virtue, being kept in salt, to draw up gold that has fallen into a well, being never so deep, if it is let down and come to touch it." He also knows all about the ram-fish, "which, lying in the shade of big ships, keeps his nose above water to spie any small fisher-boats, and then he swimmeth close to them, overturneth, and sinketh them." He enlarges on the friendship between the whale and the little musculus, "whereas the whale hath no use of his eyes, by reason of the heavy weight of his eyebrows that cover them, the other swimmeth before him and serveth him instead of eyes to show him when he is near to shelves and shallows." Other fishes hate one another, as the lobster the conger, and the lobster is so afraid of the polypus that "if he spie him near, he evermore dieth for very woe." The conger and the lamprey are always at deadly war, "insomuch that they gnaw off one another's tails."

Let us hope that it is with them as with the lizard (in that most delightful of Indian natural history books, *The Tribes on My Frontier*), who when he had left his tail between a scorpion's claws, went off and began growing a new one while the scorpion went on killing the old one. In this book, and also in the books of Rev. J. G. Wood, are some things almost as hard to stomach as some of Pliny's tales. The crows who made a sham nest, and, when the author of *The Tribes* climbed out on a big bough to take it, assembled underneath the tree to enjoy his discomfiture, deserve to be classed with the same writer's frog who swallowed half a snake, and finding the other half growing violent, dived into the water to finish the meal at leisure, and with that still bolder frog "from whose stomach I, David like, released the whole leg of a live chicken. The rest of the chicken was still outside, remonstrating clamorously," The Indian shrew-mice, too, who, when they venture out for an evening walk, take hold of one another's tails, mother first, youngest child last, and wriggle away like a hairy serpent, are as trying to one's faith as is the legend of Singhur Fort, which the Marathas took by surprise from the

Mussulmans. Catching a huge iguana, and tying a strong light rope round it, they let it clamber up the face of the rock, and wedge itself into a fissure at top; then, while it clung with more than limpet-like tenacity, Hindoo after Hindoo tightened his waist-cloth, and silently climbed the rope.

But many things may be believed of a land which is "three-quarters white ants and one quarter earthy matter," and about which we are as fond of hearing marvels as Pliny himself was. We do have strange tales about our own country, though. I have heard Mr. Wood's story of the rats getting out the oil from a bottle by dipping in their tails capped with a yet more wonderful story. A man, who for some occult reason kept the bottles in his cellar on end instead of laying them down, noticed that they all got emptied to a certain depth. Mystified beyond endurance, he watched, and saw a select company of rats doing what they are said to have done to the oil—dipping in their tails and handing them to their friends to suck. I hardly like to believe the story. I should think myself as credulous as a mediæval naturalist if I did. "How about the corks?" seems to me answer enough; and yet, knowing for a fact how marvellously rats contrive to carry off eggs, I do not like to say "No" even to the tale about their wine-bibbing. We have all heard of a rat lying down and holding an egg between its fore paws, while its fellow pulls it along by the tail; but how the rats that infested a friend's nursery managed to get eggs all the way up from the hen-house I never could tell. There they were found, behind the nursery wainscot — half-a-dozen fresh eggs, and the shells of others. Nurse was certain she had not lost any. So it would seem as if the rats must have worked them up from floor to floor, through the passages along which I and my playmates used to hear them skurrying.

The barnacle-goose is a modern marvel. Aristotle says nothing about it; and therefore Pliny and Ælian are equally silent. It is probably a church myth. If you have been about much in France—among the people, I mean—you must have met some lax curé who would not scruple to eat a "poule d'eau" in Lent. "It lives on fish; therefore, in eating it, I am eating fish," is his justification. And you may be sure he reckons as water-fowl a good many kinds that do not really belong to that element.

If, then, the barnacle-geese "were formed like a seaweed on drift-timber, to which they clung by their beaks till they were fully fledged," it would be lawful to eat them. Gerald du Barri, better known as Giraldus Cambrensis, who, in the interest of Henry the Second, found the Irish out in as many unchurchmanlike practices as possible, accuses their bishops and clergy of eating these geese in Lent on the plea that they were not really birds at all. The custom was not confined to Ireland; it was sogeneral that at a Lateran Council in 1215, it was prohibited by special edict.

But small indeed was the mediæval capacity for inventing wonders compared with that of the old world. As I said, the men of the Middle Ages only repeated what Pliny and *Aelian*, and such like had written down. I am so grateful to Mr. Watkins for having in the before-named book brought out Pliny's amusing weakness. Read Mr. Watkins, and then get Pliny, in Holland's version if you can, if not, in Bohn's series, and turn to what he says of mermen. "From Lisbon an embassy came to Tiberius to tell him that a Triton, recognised as such by its form, had shown itself in a cave, and had uttered loud sounds with a conch-shell." In these faithless times, Dr. Hawker, rector of Morwenstowe, did sit among those North Cornish rocks, and sing and twang a Jew's-harp, and make play with a looking-glass, bringing, thereby, all the idle folks from the villages round to see the sight. But, instead of sending a solemn message to Osborne or Buckingham Palace, or even telegraphing to Mr. Gladstone, the first thought of those who saw him was to shoot, so that the eccentric parson was obliged to dive hastily off his perch and get out of range. Pliny thought the sea outside the Pillars of Hercules the natural home of wonders. Near Cadiz he heard of mermen—and his informants were "men of high rank and position"—mermen who mount ships by night, and weigh down the part where they take their seat, shortly sinking the vessel if they are not dislodged.

It is to Pliny, too, that we owe all the stories about Druids, and mistletoe, and the golden sickle, and the white linen cloth; and he first tells the oft-repeated tale of the "anguinum" (serpent's egg), a great medicine among those priests of the Britons. It is formed, he says, by the joint parturition of a whole group of serpents, and so fondly do they cling to it, that he who would take it from them must provide a

swift horse if he would escape their wrath. The strangest thing is, that now and then Pliny gets into a critical mood. He believes, indeed, that a screech-owl's feet, burned with the plant plumbago, are good against serpents; but he cannot stomach the assertion that if you lay a screech-owl's heart on the left breast of a woman asleep she will disclose all her inmost secrets, nor will he admit that screech-owls' eggs cure all hair-defects, "for who," he asks, "ever found the nest, seeing the bird is so rare?" The Romans always carefully expiated a portent, and if an owl was seen in the city a special purification feast had to be held.

Naturally Pliny is great about the pygmies. He has been talking of the *Troglodytes*, of wonderful swiftness, swimming like fish in the Arabian Gulf; and then he says the "nation of the pretty pygmies lives in the marshes at the source of the Nile"—where, by the way, diminutive tribes have actually been found by explorers—"and they enjoy a truce and cessation from arms every year, when the cranes, who use to wage war with them, be once departed, and come into our countries." The cranes have cause for their enmity, seeing that the pygmies, mounted on goats and rams, and armed with arrows, come down to the sea, and for three months eat the crane's eggs and young. *Ctesias*, who wrote about Alexander's conquests, places these pygmies in India, and says they have hairy bodies, and go about wretched and morose because they are of such small size. *Vespasian*, we are told, put into the amphitheatre a number of cranes matched against dwarfs got up like pygmies.

On the other hand, I do not think that gorillas are mentioned by Pliny; his master, Aristotle, had never heard of them, never having read that really trustworthy narrative, the *Periplus of Hanno*, the Carthaginian. Hanno, who found an island full of gorillas in Southern Horn Bay, after passing the Streams of Fire, was not able to catch any of the males; they clambered up precipices, and threw rocks on their assailants. But he captured three females, who, as they could nowise be tamed, were killed and flayed, and their skins taken to Carthage.

It is good to get a little truth now and then amid the mass of fables in the old natural histories. By all accounts, the Phœnicians were a dull set, and that, perhaps, is why Hanno tells the bare truth without embellishment. What a contrast

he is to Pliny, who talks of the cavalry of Sybaris dancing in time, and speaks of the human fore-feet of Cæsar's horse as if such horses were to be met with every hundred years or so. Of course, too, he tells all about "hippomanes," the tumour on the foal's forehead, which the mother bites off, going mad if anyone takes it away before she has done so; and, as it makes a powerful love-potion, there is often somebody on the look-out to get hold of it. What faith, too, does the story of Seius's horse demand? It came of heavenly stock—being descended from those steeds of the Thracian Diomedes which Hercules carried off—and was beautiful to look at, but brought ill-luck on everyone who owned it. Seius perished and all his house; then Dolabella bought it, and came to grief; and then Crassus owned it when he lost his life and army against the Parthians.

What an enviable state of mind must that be in which one feels sure that the lard of such a sharp-sighted beast as the wolf, mixed with Attic honey, is sovereign for those whose sight is dim or troubled; that the owl comes out of its egg tail first; and that the cats, worshipped in Egypt under the name of Pasht or Bast, jumped in whenever they saw a house on fire, to the dire distress of the Egyptians, who pulled out their bodies and made mummies of them, shaving off their own eyebrows as a sign of mourning! This story, by the way, comes not from Pliny but from Herodotus, whose appetite for wonders was qualified by a suspicion—which every now and then he expresses—that those Egyptian priests were humbugging him. By the way, the cat, though it had lived in Egypt for ages, being used there as a retriever, overcoming its dislike of water in its zeal to recover the ducks its master had shot, was not in classic times domesticated in Greece or Rome. The weasel, or, rather, the marten must be understood when we read of mousing or ratting, at any rate up to Martial's time.

Well, if Mr. Watkins brings us face to face with Pliny, he also mentions modern writers, such as Harting (*Extinct British Animals*—whom he quotes aenent the wolf, which a "vulgar error" said could not live in England, the fact being that on Dartmoor and in Dean Forest it lasted nearly till Elizabeth's time); and Kelly (*Indo-European Folk-Lore*); and Rolland (*Fauna Populaire de la France*). What a delightful book this must be, judging by the only extract given to us—the

reason why the owl is always a-cold: because when the wren had got singed in bringing fire from heaven, all the other birds gave her each a feather; but the owl, which, from the thickness of its plumage, might have contributed at least a pair, totally refused to give any.

The ages of faith, then, were certainly not the ages of research. There were no museums, no *Jardin des Plantes*, no *Zoo*. Everybody compiled from his predecessor, and of much that they tell us we must say, as the showman did of Buffon, "He tells a pack of lies." And yet, when we think of all that has been written about the sea-serpent, from Bishop Pontoppidan to Captain M'Quhae, of Her Majesty's ship *Daedalus*, who figured the beast in the *Illustrated News* of October, 1848, and Captain Harrington, of Her Majesty's ship *Castilian*, ten years later, and Mr. Haynes, of Her Majesty's yacht *Osborne*, in 1877—I omit the crowd of American witnesses—we feel that the moderns have no right to laugh at the ancients on the score of credulity. The latest notion is that the "sea-serpent" is a gigantic squid or calamary; but, if so, the eyes of those who sighted it must have played strange tricks with its shape. And yet there does not seem any very good reason, after all, why the sea should not occasionally produce monstrous eels, which may have been magnified by observers, sometimes innocently enough, sometimes purposely, into the "great sea-serpent" of popular tradition.

THE CURATE.

WHAT did he know about it—the boy who stood up there
In the quaint old oak "three decker" in the ancient
house of prayer?

No sign of modern culture had touched the building
old,
Whose strong square tower had crowned the Head
for centuries untold.

The brown worm-eaten benches were ranged in
order due,
And high amid the galleries proud reigned "the
squire's pew."

And names for long forgotten spoke dumbly from
the wall,
While through the latticed windows came, the
billows' rise and fall.

What did he know about it—the boy with earnest
face,
Standing above the worshippers in the solemn time-
worn place?

There were hoary heads below him, and faces lined
by need,
They had stol'n from empty board and hearth, to
ask the Lord to heed.

To the worn and weary pilgrims on life's hard downward way,
What, from his fearless starting-point, had the young lips to say ?
What could he know about it ? Had those bright eager eyes, Seen once below the surface of our mortal miseries ? The sin, the doubt, the sorrow, the emptiness of life ; The bitter, strong temptation—the failing, fainting strife ?
The girding on the armour, to fight the battle on, With victory's hope and guerdon alike for ever gone ?
The broken dream, the shaken trust, the loss, the wrong, the fall, Ah, boyhood in its happy spring, what could it know of all ?
The sea roared on below us, the winds above us swept ; The voice went flowing onward, the old folk stared or slept. And with a rueful sigh and smile, one glanced from them to him, While the sunset touched the Cross to gold, but left the chancel dim.

STUDIES OF OVER THE WAY. CONCERNING MYSELF AND MR. SIMPSON.

I AM aware that there are certain irreverent people who treat with a spirit of unbecoming levity the fine old crusted British belief that there is no respectability like that of the substantial householder who pays rates and taxes, and has a houseful of good furniture of his own ; who serves on juries ; and is peradventure a member of the vestry, or even a guardian of the poor. I have never gone to such lengths as the scoffers above-mentioned, but sometimes I fancy I must have a sneaking kindness, or, at least, a toleration, for their gibing ; for, up to the present, my manner of life has certainly not been regulated by the maxims they affect to despise. I have never paid directly a farthing in the way of any parochial impost ; no list of jurymen or of Parliamentary voters has ever contained my name ; and, as to household furniture, I have never owned so much as a three-legged stool in all my life.

But though, as it will appear from the foregoing confession, I may have shirked the higher duties of citizenship, I think I may without presumption affirm that few men now living in London have had so large and varied an experience of furnished apartments. Since I hired my first lodgings, the distinguishing initials of every one of the metropolitan postal districts have been inscribed on my correspondence. I have had landladies of all sorts ; and my own experience of this class leads me to believe

that they are as much slandered as mothers-in-law. They have had their failings, some of them, but all have had their good qualities. In one respect, however, they have all been deficient. Not one of those who ever "did for me" has been endowed with the faculty of keeping me as a tenant for more than three years at the outside.

My name is Christopher Holt. I had only one brother, who was just a year my senior ; and my father, a substantial yeoman in North Wilts, had the ambition to make his younger son a parson, while Abraham, the elder, should till the family acres. With this view he sent me to Gazebury Grammar School, and there my education ought to have been very well looked after, for the head master, the Rev. Augustus Maddocks, had only five boys under his care. But Mr. Maddocks was a believer in the self-development theory of education, and so he let us get through our work at our own pace. All my school-fellows were accomplished idlers, and did nothing at all. I did no more in the way of lessons than they did, but I always had an insatiable appetite for reading of all sorts, and I could find no pleasanter way of spending my leisure-hours—there were many of them from sunrise to sunset—than looking at the inside of every book in Mr. Maddocks's library. He never opened one of them himself, but there was nothing dog-in-the-mangerish about Mr. Maddocks.

Thus, during my school-days, I read a good deal and learnt very little, and if my destiny, as planned by my father, had been accomplished, I doubt very much whether I should have been able to obtain, at either University, the degree necessary to procure my admission into holy orders. But before I was eighteen my father died. My younger son's portion was enough to maintain me ; but I could hardly have managed to live in any comfort without some effort of my own. I at once gave up all thought of the Church, and, while I was casting about to find an opening for my abilities, my aunt Eliza died and left me all her money. This windfall made an independent man of me, and produced, moreover, a lifelong quarrel between myself and my brother Abraham—a quarrel which has been of infinite service to me, as it has effectually relieved me of any obligation to do pecuniary service to him, or his wife, or any one of his eleven children.

I spent some four or five years in roaming about Europe, and at the end of that time

I betook myself to London and began my career as a lessee of furnished apartments. I frequented the reading-room at the British Museum assiduously. I made excursions into all the various fields of literature ; but, after a time, I lost my taste for the lighter studies and betook myself to metaphysics, and I have read, from that day till this, metaphysics, and nothing else. Now, when a man sits reading metaphysics all day long, it is highly probable that he will take short rests now and then, however absorbing the interest of the book before him may be ; and, when he looks up from his book, he will naturally turn his eyes out of the window ; and, when he looks out of a London street window, it is quite certain that the first object to attract his attention will be "Over the Way."

So it was with me. Like most metaphysicians, I am a man of sedentary habits. I sit at my writing-table in front of the window all day long, and only go out for my walks in the short days, when it is too dark for reading. In the summer, perhaps I do not stir out till eight or nine in the evening. I do not know a dozen people in London to speak to, so I am alone for the greater part of every day, and exchange a word with no one if I do not happen to have a visit either from Dr. Clausius—a German who dabbles in metaphysics—or from my friend Simpson. So I naturally lift my eyes pretty frequently from my book and look out of the window. The street architecture of our great metropolis is not very varied or attractive, and those monuments of the builder's art which have from time to time faced my dwelling-place would possibly never have attracted a second glance. Certainly they would never have aroused my interest, had it not happened that they stood all ready to intercept my gaze whenever I might look out of the window. With me it is impossible to go on looking at a particular house, day after day, for months at a stretch, without learning to regard it as something more than a certain number in a certain street. By gradual stages the house assumes a personality of its own. My mind discovers a growing distaste for the consideration of those problems which lie beyond nature. "Over the way" becomes the all-absorbing centre of my thoughts by day and of my dreams by night. The progress of my great work, the Dictionary of Metaphysics, is first retarded, and then brought to a standstill. I sit half the morning mending

my pens, though I know well enough they are all in perfect order. My manuscripts are then stowed away into a corner, for they seem to look up at me reproachfully, just as if they knew that, while I was pretending to search for a definition of the "unknowable," my thoughts were running on the past, the present, and the destiny of the house on the other side of the street.

After this, I surrender myself entirely to this strange passion, which seems to lose none of its power over me as age creeps on. By the time my first day's watch is over, a voice within me tells me that the stout, middle-aged gentleman whom I see go out every morning at half-past nine, and return at five, is not the paterfamilias of regular habits he seems to be ; that the milkman, the butcher's cart, and the grocer's boy do not stop at "over the way" merely to deliver household requisites. There is a lady who makes her appearance every Tuesday afternoon, and a stout man, with a black beard and green spectacles, who never fails to ring the bell on Friday morning. There is something in the look of both of these people which forbids the belief that they are merely ordinary callers, or music-masters, or German mistresses. No ; there is a mystery about the house—a mystery I cannot solve, so I call in my friend Simpson, and ask him to elucidate it.

This is merely a typical case. Something like it has happened in every lodging I have ever tenanted. After my interest in "over the way" is once fairly aroused, and I find that all my efforts to solve the problem by myself are vain, I set my friend Simpson to work, and in a very short time it is a mystery no more. As soon as the cat is out of the bag, I begin to lose all interest in looking out of the window, and gradually my books and papers find their places again on my writing-table ; the Dictionary of Metaphysics again progresses towards completion ; but, as I recommence my work, I find that the charm of my lodgings has fled. I look across the road with a feeling of something like contempt at the house, which no longer shrouds from me its mystery, which surrendered its secret so readily and tamely to the "victorious analysis" of Simpson ; my eyes seem to pierce through it and look beyond it, and I can sometimes hardly persuade myself that there is not a veritable gap—a house missing on the other side of the street. Then my walks abroad become longer every day. I find it as unpleasant to sit in a house which has not got an

"over the way," as ever Peter Schlemil did to walk about without a shadow, and I recognise before long the necessity of looking out for a new lodging, and a new "over the way."

The task of selecting a fresh resting-place becomes, I find, more difficult every year. The City of London, in which some of my most delightful lodgings have been situated, is now getting sadly limited as a hunting-ground. How I hate those huge ogres of warehouses and Venetian-Gothic blocks of offices which devour whole streets of eligible tenements—houses which would, any one of them, have served admirably either as a dwelling-place or as an "over the way"! Once I had an almost perfect lodging in Jamaica Square, but now all record of Jamaica Square has faded from the pages of Kelly. And as bad as the City warehouses and offices are the new, wide, straight streets in other quarters. Newport Market is doomed, and I hear that two new "arteries of traffic," as they are called, are to be driven right through the middle of Soho. But I am getting old now, and I suppose I may say of London—the London, that is, of my residential requirements—that it will last my time, as King Bomba said of his Neapolitan kingdom.

As I have before said, I have only two friends who ever visit me—Simpson, of whom I have already spoken, and Dr. Anton Clausius, of the University of Dummerhausen. Dr. Clausius spends nearly all his life in the British Museum. I first met him there while I was collecting materials for my own great work, and an intimacy soon sprang up between us, for I discovered that he too was working on somewhat similar lines. His stand-point, however, was totally different. Clausius is a man with no more imagination than a cod-fish, though I am ready to admit that his powers of classification and analysis are of a high order. When he first enters my room, I am always glad to see him. He soon becomes argumentative, and then I begin to fidget on my chair. Then he gets didactic, when I wish heartily that he would go, and, finally, dictatorial. By this time I am generally on the point of losing my temper. Once, I believe that had Simpson not been present, I should have thrown the doctor out of the window, or should, at least, have attempted to do so.

But, in spite of these temporary disturbances, our friendship manages to keep alive. I think, in a way, each one is

necessary to the other. We take great interest in each other's work, and exchange manuscripts as we progress with our investigations, making remarks thereon, which remarks we incorporate in the footnotes which are to illustrate our texts. For the benefit of my future readers, the coming generation of metaphysicians, I will here remark that anyone who sits down to read my great work will rise from its perusal with the impression that Dr. Clausius must have been a man incapable of speaking the truth, or of forming a valid judgment on any one subject, and that, even in formulating his delusive conceptions, he invariably had recourse to wrong methods. I have reason to believe, also, that, whoever may happen to read the doctor's book first, will go away with a precisely similar opinion concerning myself.

My friend Simpson is a man of a very different calibre. His faculties are not confined in one narrow groove, as is the case with Dr. Clausius, and he comes nearer to the standard of universal genius than any man I ever met. My intercourse with him, however, has not ranged over the whole field of his abilities, and has been, in the main, confined to the investigation of those mysteries which have confronted me through life. A man more completely fitted to search out the obscure byways of existence it would be hard to find. I will confess at once that there is an atmosphere of mystery surrounding him which I myself have never yet been able to penetrate. In the first place, I cannot exactly say how our acquaintance sprang up, or specify the day and the hour when I first saw him. It dates back, many years now, to a certain autumn, when I had some rooms in John Street, Golden Square. I have a dim consciousness of sitting, one fine afternoon, in my armchair, intensely interested in the movements of certain individuals who were constantly passing and repassing in and out of the house opposite. I was not feeling well, and, in addition to my other ailments, I had sprained my ankle; otherwise I think I should have sallied forth, and made an attempt to find out what might be the meaning of these mysterious goings and comings. Suddenly I was aware of the presence of a tall, lean, elderly man, grizzled and grey, clothed in a tightly-fitting frock-coat, with no shirt visible. His hair was long and irregular, falling over his forehead in heavy iron-grey masses, and, taken together with his shaggy, overhanging eyebrows and ragged

moustache, gave him at first a look of fierceness ; but this fierceness I found was more apparent than real, for I never saw a more kindly light than that which beamed from his eyes, and the tone of his voice was very soft and reassuring. He sat down, and after a few remarks of preliminary greeting, he told me that he had often wished to make my acquaintance, and had at last ventured to call upon me. I thanked him for his kindness, and then our conversation glided off towards matters of general interest. Seeing the character of the books which cumbered my writing-table, he touched upon the subject of metaphysics. I found that the ground upon which I was working was quite familiar to him. He talked clearly and forcibly, quoting authors then scarcely known in England, and at any other time I should have been delighted to listen to him by the hour together, but at that particular moment my mind was running upon what was going on on the other side of the street rather than on Hartmann and Kant.

I was greatly pleased to find that he was disposed to follow me with attention, and even eagerness, as I gradually brought the conversation round to the matter which was then uppermost in my mind. He confided to me the information that he himself, at different stages of his career, had, like me, found an all-absorbing interest in the movements of his opposite neighbours. "Mr. Simpson," I said, interrupting him, "you can, I am sure, enter into my feelings when I tell you that I am well-nigh certain that some dark and terrible mystery abides under the roof of that house on the other side of the street. Will you help me to unravel it?" He grasped my hand at once, and promised me his assistance, and after the lapse of several weeks he returned, bringing with him the strange story, the result of his investigations—a story which shall be duly told in its proper place.

I must here digress a little to remark that, though I called him Mr. Simpson at the interview described above, I had no consciousness of ever having been introduced to him. I seemed to know instinctively that his name was Simpson, and it turned out that I was right. Again, there was another peculiarity about him—a mystery which still waits for an explanation—and this was that he always managed to enter and depart from my rooms unobserved either by the landlady or the maid-of-all-work. On one occasion I had missed an umbrella from the hall, and I

said to Mary, "Don't trouble about it—perhaps Mr. Simpson took it by mistake this afternoon. Did you notice whether he had one in his hand when he went out? I think he left about half-past five." To this remark Mary replied that she had been scrubbing the stairs from five to six o'clock, and was ready to take a Bible oath that no one had gone up or down all the time she was there. On consideration it struck me that Simpson might very well have slipped past her, as his footstep was always as noiseless as a cat's. Once, too, when he was with me, my landlady entered the room, bringing with her two reading-lamps, which I had ordered to be sent to me from a shop for approval. She left them, and then Simpson and I examined them carefully, and compared their merits and defects, deciding finally that they were neither of them what I was in search of. Later on I told my landlady to take them back to the shop, as neither I nor my friend Simpson, who was in the room when she had brought them to me, approved of them. She looked at me with rather a strange expression, said she really didn't know what I meant, and ended by giving her opinion that I sat reading too much, and poring and groping over old papers and things, and that if I took more outdoor exercise I shouldn't be troubled with such fancies. It was not a polite remark, but Mrs. Davis was not a polite woman, and, if I remember rightly, I think I had already given her warning to leave.

According to my judgment, Simpson's manners are the very essence of good breeding, but I am forced to admit that there must be something about him which makes him less sympathetic to other people than he is to me. For instance, several times he has been with me when Dr. Clausius has entered the room, and though I have always formally presented him, the doctor has persistently ignored his presence with a boorish persistency which would have stood for ill-breeding in anyone else. Dr. Clausius, like many metaphysicians, is full of absurd prejudices, and doubtless this ignoring of Simpson is one of them.

I have the very highest opinion of my friend's intellectual powers. He knows more philosophy than I do myself, and has at his finger-ends all the minutest details of systems which I know merely by name. I am persuaded that if I could induce Dr. Clausius to lay aside his ridiculous aversion to my friend, and meet him in fair dialectic

—I would act as moderator—that Simpson would refute his fallacies, upset his positions, sweep into nothingness the miserable brain cobwebs which he dignifies by the name of metaphysics, and, figuratively speaking, turn him inside out in a quarter of an hour. It has more than once struck me that it is perhaps a fear of discomfiture which lies at the bottom of Dr. Clausius's dislike to Simpson, but I will put up with no more shirking. The very next time they do meet in my room, Clausius shall not leave till he has either shaken hands with Simpson or forfeited my friendship.

But I feel that I am quite incompetent to speak of my friend's varied attainments, save in the most cursory manner, for my intercourse with him has been almost entirely confined to the subject of that ever present, ever-to-be-solved mystery of "over the way." Once I remember, after I had been listening to him as he described the method by which he had fathomed a more than usually well-guarded secret, I said to him, half in banter, that he would be the very man to fill the post of chief of the secret-police for a despotic sovereign. A strange light came into his eyes, and a wintry smile crossed his lips, as he said in a grave tone that he might, perhaps, have something to say to me about the detective police of Russia, some of these days. Immediately the thought struck me that he was, perhaps, the emissary of some foreign tyrant on the look-out for Clausius. The latter said he was a German indeed; but I had only his word for it. He might belong to any other nationality just as well with that extraordinary accent of his. Perhaps he was a political exile, a Socialist, an Irreconcilable, or worse. I have always understood that the political and social reformers of Russia have rather a bad time of it when they go to the mines of an adjacent region; and perhaps Clausius, if he ever goes there, may learn, from the touch of the whip, that all he has written for the last dozen years about the Genesis of motion is incorrect.

Like many men of sedentary habit, I suffer from sleeplessness, and often when I find it useless to court slumber in bed, I rise, and, having let myself silently out of the front door, take an hour's ramble through the well-nigh deserted streets. Now everyone knows that the streets of London in the small hours of the morning are not so safe as they ought to be, and Simpson is evidently of the opinion that

it is not right for me to go unprotected in my nocturnal wanderings, for he watches for me every night, and, as soon as I am round the corner, he draws nearer and follows me wherever I may go, keeping all the time about a dozen yards in the rear. I can see plainly that he does not wish me to recognise him; and, knowing his modest, unostentatious disposition, I have always pretended not to see him.

If I had lived in the Middle Ages, or even as late as the seventeenth century, I should most likely have looked upon my friend as the possessor of powers other than those of this world. Indeed, even now I sometimes wonder whether he may not have plumbed the depths of those obscure sciences which our savants treat as charlatans' impostures, because they themselves are baffled on the threshold. On the whole, I find this to be the most reasonable explanation of his wonderful powers of insight; for I am sure my readers will admit that these powers of his are marvellous, when they shall have read of some of the extraordinary discoveries he has made, following up a clue which, to the eyesight of an ordinary mortal, would have had no meaning at all. Again, his courage is as remarkable as his sagacity, for few men would care to face the dangers which he often courts, merely to satisfy the curious whims of a bookworm like myself. To hear him calmly telling his story, you would be certain that he must have been an eye-witness of all the events he was describing, though how he could have been present in the flesh, and have come away alive from some of the scenes he has told me of, is another of those mysteries which envelop the personality of this remarkable man. On one occasion, the story he was telling me seemed so impossible that for a moment I was tempted to doubt him; but one glance into his deep, truthful eyes reassured me, and now I should no more think of questioning the accuracy of anything, however marvellous, which he might tell me, than I should of questioning the existence of Simpson himself.

COUNT PAOLO'S RING.

A SHORT SERIAL STORY.

CHAPTER III.

"WELL, Nancie, all I can say is that I think it is most inconsiderate of your father to expect such a thing, but it is just

like him—just! I never knew such a man in my life; he has no consideration at all for me—but he never had, for that matter. As if it was not enough to have two grown-up daughters to chaperon and take out, I mean—”

Mrs. Monteith corrected herself with a slight accession of colour mounting into her florid face, and an inward thanksgiving that only Nancie was present to hear the slip. An incessant struggle to keep the aspirate in the place assigned to it by popular prejudice and Lindley Murray was one of the many trials of Mrs. Monteith's life.

“Out into society, but he must bring another girl, and that girl half a foreigner, to plague me.”

“How you do worry yourself about nothing, mother! I dare say she will be very nice.” Nancie looked up, half impatiently, half sympathetically, from the table near the window, where she was seated, sorting a heap of bright-coloured silks. “And you know that for a year, at least, Angela will not be able to go out at all. Her deep mourning will prevent that, and who knows what may happen in a year? Perhaps, before that is over, you may have got either Carrie or me off your hands.”

“Not if you are as pert and standoffish with the young men as you are now, Nancie.” And Mrs. Monteith shook her head and looked severely across the room at Nancie's amused face. “They don't like such ways, I can assure you. I am quite certain that young Wilkes would have proposed to you long ago, if you had given him any encouragement.”

“I could never consent to become a Mrs. Wilkes, mother,” put in Nancie demurely.

“But you frightened the poor young man. ‘Nancie's too clever for me, Mrs. Monteith,’ he said to me only a few days ago; ‘she snaps me up till I don't know whether I am standing on my head or my heels.’ That was just his expression. That's not the way to get a husband, Nancie.”

“I don't want one.”

“That's nonsense; all girls do. They say they don't, but”—and Mrs. Monteith shook her head and smiled darkly—“they are generally ready enough to take the chance when it comes, I notice.”

“I shall be an honourable exception to the rule. Here comes Carrie the Majestic. Let us ask her to favour us with her views on the subject.”

Nancie leant back in her chair and looked up at her sister with mischievous, laughing eyes.

Carrie the Majestic, as the elder Miss Monteith was generally called by her irreverent younger sister, was a tall, fine-looking girl, with a bright complexion, bright, bold black eyes, and a quantity of rather coarse black hair, piled in a coronet at the top of her head. Her appearance, indeed, justified the use of the appellation, for there was something very majestic and dignified in her carriage, and the stately air with which she swept across the room called forth an approving, “Very good—very good, indeed; you improve daily, Carrie,” from Nancie. But Carrie was too much excited to notice her.

“Mother, what do you think father has just told me? He has had a letter from the Count Paolo Ostrolenka about Angela Monteith. She will travel with some friend, the Princess di Capri, I think”—and there was a slight tinge of awe in Carrie's voice—“and arrive here on the fifteenth. The fifteenth, you know, is our garden-party and dance. Did you ever know anything so provoking? And father says it must be put off; that he—you know father's elegant way of expressing himself—would have no ‘jigging and jingling’ in the house on the day of Angela's arrival. What shall we do?”

“Why, put it off, of course,” Nancie remarked philosophically. “It won't matter for a week or two; in fact, the dance will be all the pleasanter if we wait till the weather is a little cooler. I quite agree with father. It would be very indecent to have ‘jigging and jingling’ in the house on the first night.”

Mrs. Monteith looked helpless. She was a big, stout woman; an enlarged and overblown edition of her eldest daughter. She had the same bold eyes, the same bright colour, and rather large, sensuous lips.

Nancie took more after her father's family. She was not exactly pretty, but she had a merry, pleasant face; the softest, most innocent-looking blue eyes; and the daintiest hands and feet imaginable.

But although she looked so mild and innocent, Miss Nancie had a sharp wit of her own, and a tongue which could say biting things at times, and under which Carrie often writhed in impotent wrath.

“Of course it must be put off,” she repeated; and she looked from one to the other with determined eyes.

"Well, I don't know about that, Nancie. It will be very inconvenient to countermand the orders to the tradesmen, and to write explanations and excuses to all our friends," Mrs. Monteith said snapishly. "How extremely annoying of Angela to choose that especial day for her arrival! But there, it is all of a piece with the rest! I suppose we must put off the party, if your father says so. When once he sets his foot down, no earthly power can induce him to take it up again till he chooses," she added; and she sank back in her chair, and played impatiently with her watch-chain. "What do you think, Carrie?"

"I really don't know what to say. You see, it will be inconvenient to put it off for more reasons than one. Lady Sara Clarige expects her nephew, Sir Noel, at the Hall on the 14th, and she promised to bring him with her. Now, it is improbable that he will stay more than a few days at the Hall——"

"I should think not, indeed! Who would stay a day longer than he could help at that old vault?" Nancie interposed contemptuously.

"And I should very much like him to be present," Carrie went on, placidly ignoring the remark. "Don't you remember what a fuss the Thompson girls made because they had been introduced to him by Lady Sara at the bazaar? They would be so savage if he came here. Oh, I don't think we can put it off, mother. Mr. Monteith's death is certainly very recent; but——"

Mrs. Monteith sighed plaintively.

"Yes, indeed! Most inconvenient, happening just now."

"Most inconvenient, as you say; still, it is scarcely fair to blame him for that, is it?" And Nancie looked up with a tranquil amusement in her eyes. "And I only trust that when our time comes for shuffling off this mortal coil, we may select the date with a due consideration for the engagements and convenience of our friends!"

"Don't be irreverent, Nancie! I think I shall ask dear Lady Sara what she thinks," Mrs. Monteith went on meditatively. "It is such a comfort to have a friend on whose opinion one can confidently rely. I can never be thankful enough for the privilege of calling her friend, though I could wish," and there was a mildly regretful tone in Mrs. Monteith's voice, "she had not quite such a contempt for

appearances, and did not dress quite so shabbily——"

"She can't help being shabby," Nancie the irrepressible interrupted; "I dare say she has not very much money to spend on dress, but she could be clean. I declare that old brocade which she wears on state occasions, and which must be as well known to everybody as the town-clock, would stand alone with dirt.

"Richness, Nancie! That brocade is an heirloom in the family—it belonged to Lady Sara's great-grandmother. You never see brocade like that nowadays," Mrs. Monteith said severely.

"I have not the faintest desire to do so. Belonged to her great-grandmother, did it? Well, it looks like it! Fancy walking about in a dress which bears the accumulated dirt of four generations!" and Nancie wrinkled up her nose in ineffable disgust. "I'd rather by far have a clean gingham! But there, I have plebeian tastes, I know. And I have also noticed," said Miss Nancie, leaning back in her chair, and steadily regarding her mother's disapproving face, "that there is not that prejudice against dirt among the aristocracy which prevails in the middle-classes of society. Extremes meet, we are told, and on this point the lowest and the highest classes are in sympathy. It would be difficult to say," Nancie went on with a melancholy smile, "which is blackest, Lady Sara's lace, or Mrs. Jenkins's—you know Mrs. Jenkins, mother—the costermonger's wife's apron, and they are both equally indifferent to the fact."

"What are you going to do this morning, mother?" Carrie again ignored her sister's remarks placidly. "I shall drive into town to match the silk for my dress. The dressmaker has sent some patterns, but I don't like any of them."

"Then you can drop me at the Mill," Nancie said. "I promised father I would go down to-day to see the new designs which have just come from Paris. He says there are some lovely things. Now don't look contemptuous, Carrie. I have more sense than to turn up my nose at my father's business," Nancie added, with a little heightened colour flushing into her face. "Oh, I wish I had been a boy!"

"I wish you had, with all my heart; I shall never succeed in making a lady of you," Mrs. Monteith said irritably. "You are your father all over."

"I could not wish to resemble a better person," Nancie cried.

Her eyes were sparkling angrily, and an angry retort was on her lips, but the sudden opening of the door, and the entrance of a tall lady dressed in dingy black, with a close bonnet and veil, stopped the words. Nancie bit her lip, and coloured and frowned as the new comer entered. She glanced at the window, but it was closed, and there was no way of escape possible, so she submitted to the inevitable, and coming forward, held out her hand to the visitor as soon as Carrie and her mother had finished their greeting.

"Good-morning, Lady Sara."
"Good-morning, Miss Nancie."

Lady Sara extended one finger. It was a very long and bony finger, and it was encased in black kid very much worn at the tip. Nancie looked at it, hesitated as if in doubt what to do with it, and finally, with a gleam of fun in her eyes, extended her own forefinger, and gave the bony digit a little cheerful pat.

"Rheumatics bad, I suppose. Oh, I am so sorry," she said demurely, and then, without waiting for an answer, retired to her seat by the window, and resumed her occupation of sorting her silks.

"Take this chair, dear Lady Sara," Mrs. Monteith drew forward a comfortable easy-chair. "Have you walked all the way? Dear me," as Lady Sara gave a gesture of assent, "you must be tired. You will take a glass of wine and just a bit of something to eat? Now don't say no. Carrie, love, ring the bell."

Mrs. Monteith fussed about the room, brought out a footstool for her visitor, enquired if she felt the room hot, if she would like a window open, and made a hundred other suggestions, to which Lady Sara listened in dignified silence, only occasionally bowing her head, or waving her hand in answer. Nancie looked on with a disgusted expression on her face. Anything approaching to snobbishness or sycophancy was hateful to her, and it made her—as she herself would have expressed it—feel mad to see the fuss which her mother and sister made over this most unpleasant old woman.

"Why can't she open her mouth and use her tongue like other people?" Nancie thought viciously, "instead of sitting there wagging her head like a Chinese Mandarin or the Grand Llama, or anything else utterly imbecile and idiotic. I should like to throw something at her."

But Lady Sara scarcely spoke until

strengthened by a couple of glasses of sherry and half a plate of biscuits. She sat erect and listened to Mrs. Monteith's ceaseless flow of conversation, and bowed her head, and now and then murmured a sepulchral "Yes" and "No," till the last drop of sherry was drained from the bottom of the glass, then, turning to Mrs. Monteith, she said, with what was intended to be a gracious smile, but which approached more nearly to a contraction of the muscles of the mouth:

"I must apologise for calling so early, Mrs. Monteith; but—"

"Oh dear no, please don't; so kind and friendly, dear Lady Sara," Mrs. Monteith murmured. "I am delighted to see you at any time."

Lady Sara inclined her head slowly.

"You are very kind to say so; but the fact is, my visit this morning is on business. I want your advice and co-operation—and that of your daughters as well, of course," she added graciously.

Both the daughters looked up at the words; the one with a pleased smile, the other with a slight contraction of the brows, and a somewhat aggressive expression of countenance.

"Wants something? Of course she does. When did she ever come without wanting something?" Nancie thought viciously, but she had discretion enough to keep her thoughts to herself, and only vented her feelings by an impatient pull at her silks.

"Yes, my nephew, the Reverend—"

"And Honourable."

Mrs. Monteith supplied the omission in a low voice. Lady Sara smiled.

"Among friends, dear Mrs. Monteith, we may drop the title. My nephew, the Rev. Maurice Lansdell, is very anxious to raise sufficient money to purchase new surplices for his choir. He suggested soliciting subscriptions from the congregation, but I thought a garden-party would be a better and more effectual way of raising the wind. We could have games, and music, and refreshments, you know, and, of course, charge for admission," and Lady Sara smiled benignly. "What do you say, Miss Nancie? Young ladies always enjoy garden-parties; they are an excuse to wear a new dress and to show off admirers."

With a view to conciliating the enemy in the camp, she turned to Nancie with a propitiatory smile, but Nancie declined to be propitiated.

"As I have neither a new dress nor an admirer, Lady Sara, I am not in a position to judge," she said coldly.

"Ah well, others are more fortunate." Lady Sara gave up the attempt at conciliation, and assumed a dignified air. "I offered Maurice the use of my park and gardens, and I said I was sure you would be willing to do your part, Mrs. Monteith; you are always so kind! And we want this little scheme to be carried out entirely among ourselves," Lady Sara went on impressively, "without admitting any outsiders. It is so difficult to draw the line, is it not? especially in a town like this. So we will keep it quite to ourselves —eh, dear Mrs. Monteith? You quite understand?"

"Oh yes, I quite understand." It was Nancie, and not Mrs. Monteith who answered, and she looked straight at Lady Sara as she spoke. "You are to give the use of your park and garden, and mother is to provide the music, and refreshments, and the amusements generally. Oh, a charming arrangement! and one which does credit to the Hon. and Rev. Maurice Lansdell's ingenuity; but I think, on the whole, mother dear, you would find it cheaper to buy the surplices out and out."

Lady Sara gave a portentous frown, which made Mrs. Monteith shake in her shoes.

She looked angrily at her rebellious daughter.

"Hold your tongue, Nancie! You know nothing about it," she said sharply. "Yes, Lady Sara, as you say, I am always willing to give all the help in my power."

"I was sure of it." Lady Sara smiled again. "Maurice is coming to call presently to talk the affair over. I dare say"—as a loud knock sounded at the hall-door—"there he is."

Both the girls were affected, though in various ways, by this speech. Carrie coloured and bridled, and cast a furtive glance at the mirror, and Nancie rose from her chair, and exclaiming that the terrier was chasing her favourite kitten across the lawn, opened the window, and went to the rescue of her favourite.

She did not return to the house, but sauntered among the flower-beds, and pulled off a dead flower here and there, or paused to exchange a few words with the gardener, who was mowing the lawn. The gardens and pleasure-grounds of Monteith Abbey—it was Mrs. Monteith who had given that

high-sounding title to the house, principally, or so Nancy declared, because it was as much unlike an abbey as a house could be—were not extensive, but they were very pretty, for there was an abundance of fine old trees which surrounded the house, and were dotted about the lawn, which was always kept in perfect order. The house itself was of red brick, with great bay-windows wreathed with clematis and roses, and a conservatory at one side filled with valuable and beautiful plants. The house had many natural advantages, for in front and at one side were purple moors which stretched far away to the foot of a low range of hills, and the great manufacturing town of Barlaston, two miles away, was almost shut out by a thick belt of trees.

It was a charming place in summer; though in winter, when the wind swept across the moors, and the storms of wind and rain beat against the window, one might, as Mrs. Monteith often did, sigh for a more sheltered spot. But on this August morning it would have been difficult to find a fairer scene, and so Nancie thought as she sauntered up and down the garden, fully conscious that from the breakfast-room her movements would be anxiously watched by one pair of eyes, and that the owner of those eyes was longing for the moment to arrive when he might with propriety leave the company in the breakfast-room and join her outside.

Nancie was a refractory, but at the same time a favourite, member of the Rev. Maurice Lansdell's flock. She did not regard him with that implicit faith and reverence which it was his happy lot to receive from Carrie, and most of the other young ladies of the congregation; she was inclined to be critical respecting his sermons, and to laugh at the airs of spiritual authority which he occasionally assumed towards her. But as the sheep which is lost is more precious to the shepherd than the remainder of his flock, so this lamb, who was so much inclined to stray from the fold and the ordinary sheep-walk into divers paths of her own choosing, absorbed considerably more of the shepherd's attention and thoughts than the ninety-and-nine tender lambs who followed meekly in his footsteps, nor evinced the faintest inclination to turn aside.

The pretty, lithe figure flitting about the soft green sward among the roses had a singularly distracting effect upon the Rev. Maurice's mind; it was with difficulty

that he recalled his wandering attention to the subject under discussion—the garden-party—and he was unfeignedly glad when, Carrie being called away to speak to her dressmaker, and Mrs. Monteith and Lady Sara fairly launched on the absorbing topic of the misdemeanours of their respective domestics, he was able to slip quietly out of the room, and through the conservatory into the garden.

Nancie looked up as he approached, and held out a slim white hand. She had tied her handkerchief over her head instead of a hat, and the quaint head-dress suited the coquettish face to perfection. Lansdell thought that he had never before realised that under certain circumstances Nancie could look absolutely pretty.

A rosebud set with little wilful thorns.

He was irresistibly reminded of the line as he looked at her.

"Well, is the consultation over, and have you settled it all to your satisfaction?" she asked dryly.

"We have settled everything. Lady Sara lends her park, I provide the band, and Mrs. Monteith has kindly undertaken to supply the refreshments," Mr. Lansdell answered, "so I may promise my poor choristers new surplices before long. We are to have tennis, croquet, and all kinds of amusements, so if only the weather is fine our success will be certain."

"And when is it to take place?"

"On the twenty-second, I believe. By the way, I hear the Abbey is to have a new inmate soon."

"A new inmate! Good gracious, don't talk as if we kept a lunatic asylum!" cried Nancie petulantly. "Yes; a cousin is coming to live with us—at least, she isn't exactly a cousin. Her father and my father were half-cousins, it is true, but my brain is not subtle enough to determine the exact relationship in which she stands to me. However, she is coming, and on the fifteenth too, unfortunately!"

"Why unfortunately?"

"Because our garden-party and dance are fixed for that date, and mother and Carrie are much disturbed in consequence. Father says it must be put off, and mother is hesitating between two opinions—the natural objection to having her arrangements disturbed, and her dread of offending against propriety," Nancie answered gravely. "She is going to ask Lady Sara's opinion, I believe. Your inestimable relative is

good enough to supply a want which has been long felt in our family, Mr. Lansdell. Mother consults her, instead of the book of etiquette, as to what is and what is not considered the correct thing by society. Now, Mr. Lansdell," and Nancie looked up with demure, laughing eyes, "you are in society, condescend for one moment to act as society's representative, and inform me if you consider it correct to have what father calls 'jigging and jingling' in the house on the first introduction of a bereaved relative to the family circle?"

Lansdell laughed as he looked down at the merry, mocking face, and he stroked his moustache gravely.

"Extremely incorrect, I should say," he answered.

Nancie folded her little hands, and assumed an absurdly exaggerated expression of relief and thanksgiving.

"Oh, I am glad I asked you!" she said. "Now my mind is quite set at rest. Fortified by the verdict of society and the voice of the Church, I can dare to express and maintain my own opinion, no matter how fiercely the enemy may rage."

"You would do that in any case."

Mr. Lansdell frowned slightly. He was a tall man, with bright eyes and a determined mouth. He was a bit of a martinet in his parish, and expected and received implicit obedience from his curate and lay helpers—from everyone, indeed, connected with the church, except from the bright-eyed little rebel at his side, who took, or so he sometimes thought, a malicious pleasure in contradicting him.

"I never knew anyone with more decided opinions, or more ready in expressing those opinions openly, than you, Miss Nancie," he went on in a tone of some severity.

Nancie's eyes sparkled with delight, but with some difficulty she banished the mirth from her face, sighed, and first drooped her long lashes, and then raised them to cast a pathetic look at his stern face.

"Ah, how little you know me!" she sighed. "How little you understand my timid, shrinking nature! I always feared it was so; now I know it! Why, I am the least opinionated of mortals, Mr. Lansdell. One of the great—indeed, I may say, the greatest defect in my character is a disinclination to exercise my own judgment, and to lean upon that of others. Do you mean to say"—and she flashed a merry glance at her companion—"you have never noticed this failing—this want, if I may so call it, of self-reliance in my character?"

"I certainly never have." Mr. Lansdell's tone was very emphatic. "Or anyone else," he added.

"Really? Well, that's a comfort, anyway," said Nancie cheerfully. "It is consoling to find out that one's chief faults are more apparent to one's self than one's neighbours, and I do struggle against it."

"That you certainly do. I may speak from experience, at all events, for you never hesitate to express your opinion respecting any of my actions, especially if, as is generally the case, it happens to be an unfavourable one," he added dryly.

Nancie looked at him pathetically.

"What an unkind speech! But I know what it means—it is the old story of Mordecai and Haman over again! Why can't you be contented with the admiration of your court of admirers, and allow this poor insignificant Mordecai to stand aloof if she likes?"

She glanced up at him as she said the words with mocking eyes, with a mocking smile on her sweet lips. Mr. Lansdell's face softened as he looked down at her.

"Perhaps because I set a higher value on Mordecai's opinion and goodwill than on all the rest beside, Miss Nancie," he said, and he gave an agitated laugh, and put his hand gently on her arm.

Nancie coloured and laughed. She drew her arm gently away, and gathered a rose with fingers that trembled a little nervously.

"Oh, that is nonsense!" she said; "but we won't quarrel this morning, it is too hot. Now tell me the news. Is the Bishop coming to consecrate the new cemetery, and when?"

"Next week. By the way, do you think your mother will entertain him? Our accommodation at the vicarage is so very limited. It would only be for one day and night."

"Why not send him to Lady Sara?"

Lansdell laughed.

"I have not yet abandoned all hopes of preferment, Miss Nancie," he said dryly.

Nancie gave her sweet, low laugh.

"Poor Lady Sara! Well, you can ask mother, Mr. Lansdell, but I am almost afraid that she will hesitate to entertain the distinguished guest after the fiasco that occurred during the last Bishop's visit to us. What," as Mr. Lansdell looked at her with an enquiring expression, "do you mean to say that you never heard of it? Oh, I must have told you a dozen times."

"No, I never heard of any fiasco; what was it?"

"I will tell you."

Nancie's dimples peeped out in a most bewitching manner, and her eyes danced with surprised amusement.

"It was soon after we came to this house—soon after we had emerged from our chrysalis state, but had scarcely learned to use our wings properly—and mother was asked to entertain the Bishop. There was a confirmation or something of the kind, and he was to stay one night. We had just set up a page, and Carrie and mother were, of course, very anxious that he should acquit himself with grace and decorum during the visit of the distinguished guest. So we spent long and anxious hours in instructing him in his duties, and it was such fun!" Nancie laughed. "We—Carrie and I, and the page—used to have private rehearsals. I," and Nancie elevated her head in conscious pride, "was the Bishop, with an antimacassar tied round my waist to imitate the episcopal apron. I lay upon the couch in an attitude of careless ease—"

"Why on the couch?"

"The couch was supposed to be the bed; Carrie was instructing the page in the correct way of taking up the episcopal shaving water and boots. He was told to knock at the door in a subdued, gentle manner, and when desired to enter was taught to say, 'The boots, my lord,' in a tone of deep reverence, and then to retire with a low bow. So I represented the Bishop, and I flatter myself I did my part very fairly, though it did not occur to me until afterwards that Bishops do not, as a rule—at least, I suppose they don't—wear the insignia of office while indulging in Nature's sweet restorer; and we drilled Joseph until he was quite perfect in his part; but"—and Nancie shook her head sadly—"alas for the futility of human plans! Up to a certain point the programme was carried out satisfactorily. Joseph carried up the water and boots, knocked at the door with due decorum, but whether it was that the squeaky voice which bade him enter startled him by its unlikeness to the deep-toned accents in which I had rehearsed the words, or whether the sight of the episcopal nightcap was too much for his nerves, I have never been able to determine; but this is certain. He dropped his burden suddenly, and with a hurried exclamation of 'Oh, Lord! the boots!' fled, covered with confusion, from the scene of his failure."

Lansdell laughed incredulously.

"Did you witness the scene?"

Nancie sighed and hung her head dejectedly.

"To my eternal regret, to my everlasting sorrow, I must confess that I did not," she answered.

"Nor anyone else, I suppose! I should like to have the testimony of an eyewitness," Lansdell said dryly.

"I am very much afraid you are sceptical;" Nancy shook her head at him reprovingly; "and scepticism, as you remarked last Sunday, is the greatest enemy with which the Church has to contend," she said demurely. "Let us change the subject. Look at my roses—are they not lovely? I will give you one if you will ask for it prettily." Carrie, or, indeed, any other young lady of the congregation, would as soon have thought of making this audacious suggestion to the Archbishop of Canterbury as to the dignified vicar of St. Andrews, but he did not look displeased at the freedom, and he took both rose and hand and held the latter tightly in his own for an instant.

"By the way, Nancie, have you found time to think over that question we were discussing the other night," he said, and though his voice was as quiet as usual, a keen observer might have detected a faint increase of colour in his face, and a new eagerness in his eyes. Nancie, too, coloured, and she drew her hand away hastily.

"Oh dear no; I have never had a minute to spare since then," she said impatiently.

"Do you think you will be able to do so soon? Nancie—Nancie," and the quiet voice changed and grew very earnest, "think of the suspense I am suffering, think what your answer means to me, and be merciful! Put me out of my misery, dear."

Nancie frowned impatiently.

"Oh, dear me, how tiresome you are! I have told you over and over again that we should never get on together," she said petulantly. "I like you; oh, very well; perhaps if you were not a clergyman I might like you very much; but I should hate to be a clergyman's wife—I know I should!"

"How can you know? Try the experiment, dear! Believe me, I will do my best to smooth the difficulties out of your path, to make your life happy," Lansdell said earnestly. "It will not be my fault if I do not succeed."

But Nancie shook her head wilfully.

"Oh, no—no!" she said, "it would never do. Listen!" she held up her hand warningly; "I hear voices—yes!" as Lady Sara and Carrie came in sight from behind the trees. "Here they come! I shall gracefully retire."

She laughed and turned away, glad of the excuse to hide her flushed cheeks from Lansdell's searching eyes. Her lips were smiling, but there was a mist of tears before her eyes—an odd, choking sensation in her throat.

"I am glad they came, I believe I should have made a fool of myself in another minute—I should have said yes, and repented ever afterwards," she said to herself with an hysterical sob. "I thought it was all nonsense the other day when he asked me, but he was in earnest enough to-day at all events."

She paused by a little fountain, which discharged its shining waters into a small marble basin, and bending over the edge looked critically at her flushed face.

"Oh, you little fool! I do believe there are tears in your eyes," she said impatiently. "Well, there's one comfort—he did not see them."

But Lansdell, little as Nancie guessed it, had seen the gleaming drops, and the sight revived his hopes. He looked after her with a quiet smile, as she darted from his side and fled across the lawn.

"You won't listen to me now, Nancie, but, never mind, some day you will. Some day I will ask you again, and you will give me a different answer. I can afford to wait till then," he said; and his face, as he turned and greeted the other ladies, was certainly very unlike the face of a rejected suitor.

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